VZCZCXRO6874 RR RUEHKN RUEHKR RUEHMJ RUEHNZ RUEHPB DE RUEHSV #0121/01 0871434 ZNR UUUUU ZZH R 271434Z MAR 08 FM AMEMBASSY SUVA TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0455 INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1976 RUEHKN/AMEMBASSY KOLONIA 0254 RUEHKR/AMEMBASSY KOROR 0152 RUEHMJ/AMEMBASSY MAJURO 0687 RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1502 RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0077 RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0617 RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 1032 RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI RHMFIUU/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000121

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TAGS: PGOV PREL FJ
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE - "PEOPLE'S CHARTER" REMAINS INTERIM
GOVERNMENT'S TOP PRIORITY

REF: WELLINGTON 114

#### Summary

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11. (SBU) The day after the Pacific Island Forum Foreign Ministers expressed their concern that Fiji's "People's Charter" should not be used to delay the planned March 2009 elections in Fiji (reftel), Interim PM Bainimarama implied that is exactly what may happen. In a speech 3/27, Bainimarama said the Charter is a necessary prerequisite to elections and listed a number of reasons why "elections alone" will not solve Fiji's problems. Others were more explicit, with Catholic Archbishop Mataca stating in a speech immediately following Bainimarama's that any delay in the Charter process would result in putting off the elections. Finance Minister Chaudhry chimed in, say that elections should not take place until the Charter is implemented. In his 3/27 speech, Bainimarama insisted that the Charter is totally independent from the IG, even though he is co-chair and ten cabinet ministers are members. The decision by a Charter working group to disinvite a former Police Commissioner from their consultations because of his views on the military calls into question that "independence." End Summary.

# Bainimarama Says Charter Top Priority

12. (SBU) In a 3/27 speech to members of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF), Interim PM Bainimarama said that while the IG is committed to elections in March of next year, elections will be meaningless unless the "People's Charter" is put in place beforehand. (Note: the NCBBF is the group charged with drafting the Charter. Bainimarama is co-chair.) The Charter, said Bainimarama, is an essential prerequisite to elections. "How can an election, on its own," he said, "make a difference when it is based on divisive and race based communal electoral arrangements?" "How can an election, on its own. solve the deep differences that our Constitution has perpetuated between the different races of our country." "Unless there are fundamental reforms, how can an election be a success where it will take us straight back to the grimy old politics of self interest, cronyism, and scare mongering."
Bainimarama lashed out at "opponents and detractors" Charter efforts, criticized the media for "negative" reporting about the Charter and for failing to understand the Charter's importance, and said the international community was focusing far too much on elections and had ignored "other Archbishop Mataca Says Elections May be Delayed If the Charter Process is Not Completed

13. (SBU) In a speech immediately following Bainimarama's, NCBBF co-chair Catholic Archbishop Mataca urged Australia, New Zealand and other countries to financially support the Charter process. "If Australia and New Zealand are really concerned with the future of democracy and rule of law in Fiji," he said, "they should provide resources to support the People's Charter, in addition to support for the election in March, 2009." "The People's Charter is important to the credibility of the election," said Mataca. "I am concerned that if the work on the Charter is prolonged through lack of resources, this could threaten our ability to have the election at the scheduled time."

### Chaudhry Weighs In

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14. (SBU) Interim Finance Minister Chaudhry also chimed in 3/27. The Charter, he said, is crucial for Fiji. "Elections should come after the Charter has been formulated and put to the people, and finally endorsed." The international community needs to understand, he said, that elections in themselves are not the solutions to the problems Fiji faces.

IG Insists the Charter Process is Independent; The Facts Say Otherwise

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15. (SBU) In his 3/27 speech Bainimarama emphasized that the People's Charter process is independent of the Interim

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Government. "You know as a fact that by now that we, the Interim Government, do not direct your discussions or manipulate your discussions, nor the work being done by the Task Teams, the Working Groups and the Technical Secretariat." A recent decision by Charter's Technical and

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Support Secretariat to exclude former Police Commissioner Isikia Savua from the Charter process clearly calls into question Bainimarama's claims. Savua, a former high ranking military officer, was reportedly asked by the Secretariat to compile a report on the military earlier this month. Soon after he sent over a draft report March 13, he was informed by the Secretariat that his participation in the Charter was no longer needed. Savua said that according to the Secretariat, "someone had objected to my participation vis a

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vis the military." Savua told reporters, "it makes me think - do they want people who tell them what they need to know, or do they want people who tell them what they want to know."

## ${\tt Comment - A \ Challenge \ to \ the \ Forum \ Ministers}$

16. (SBU) The statements from Bainimarama, Mataca and Chaudhry challenge two of the major points made by Forum Foreign Ministers in Auckland - that the IG should ensure the Charter does not distract from or delay elections, and that elections must be held under the terms of the current constitution. As noted reftel, the Forum ministers put forward a strong, unified message that they expect the IG to fulfill its commitments to hold free and fair elections next year. It appears, however, that many in the IG are still seeking a way to back out of those commitments.